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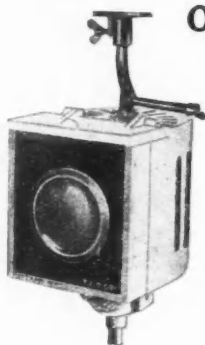
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DRAMA

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FEBRUARY MCMXXIX

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THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

By S. R. Littlewood

PERHAPS it is an accident that alike from the rout of Christmas and the presumably austerer circumstances of the New Year, the Victorian theme emerges. More probably the true reason is a certain scarcity of creative genius. We happen to be at a time when there is really no one on this side of the Atlantic—nor, one gathers, on the other—forging out new worlds for the theatre. We have to be content if we can get some clever doll-dressing, or a little bit of more or less honest history, or the digging out of some queer old play from the bran-tub of the past. Hence "Pickwick," "The Lady with a Lamp," and "Fashion"—all of them a kind of window-dressing of the Victorian age for our instruction, or amusement, or both.

The most important of them is, of course, Captain Reginald Berkeley's "The Lady with a Lamp," heralded in some quarters as a work of stupendous greatness. With every congratulation to its gallant and able author—the mistake may be mine—I do not find quite those evidences of profound intellect and supreme imaginative power. I do not, indeed, see very much more than a comparatively discreet and certainly most welcome tribute to Florence Nightingale, derived for the most part from familiar sources, with a dash of Mr. Lytton Strachey, and a really excellent portrait of Lord Palmerston.

Wherever Captain Berkeley's invention is called into play—as in the love-episode—I seemed to find points at which disagreement was possible. Miss Edith Evans's playing of a personality intensely difficult to any modern actress pleased me entirely at the finish, but not so much in the earlier scenes. A little more quiet command and a little less personal comedy would, I thought, have suggested a reconstruction of the "Lady-in-Chief" better. Lady Herbert—though Miss Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies acted her beautifully—appeared to me unfairly treated by Captain Berkeley, as also Miss Nightingale's mother and other women of the play.

Those of us who knew educated women of that period intimately, recognize that there was something about them nearly all that Captain Berkeley does not convey—something that is above our criticism. There is a tendency nowadays—natural, perhaps—to look upon Victorians at large as a crowd of curious incompetents. Let us be just to our mothers. Antimacassars and chignons and crinolines and all, the "age and body of the time" had a dignity and grace which Florence Nightingale shared, and against which she never rebelled.

With "Pickwick" we are on clearer ground. Mr. Cosmo Hamilton, the chief collaborator in its adaptation, makes no pretences. He lays claim to nothing

PLAYS OF THE MONTH

more than to have supplied a set of "coloured prints" for the stage. This he has most certainly done, and anything more was not to be expected. Even if a play could have been made out of "Pickwick"—and there are at least two plays there—it would not convey the real value.

It would not convey, for instance, the way in which Pickwick himself as a character changes and deepens as the story goes on. How much of the joy of the book comes from recognizing how the young "cub-reporter," asked to do a series of sporting sketches in imitation of Jorrocks, found his feet in the very centre of the book as a great novelist and foreshadowed, before he had done, almost everything that Charles Dickens was to be! As it is, the Christmas party which Mr. Basil Dean has produced is, doubtless, all that one should ask. Apart from Mr. George Curzon's Jingle and Mr. Eliot Makeham's Sam Weller, I did not find a single character—least of all Mr. Charles Laughton's Pickwick—suggest anything beyond a fancy-dress charade. But if so, what harm.

Then we have seen the jolly little Victorian "rag" at the Gate Theatre, with its half-burlesque of Mrs. Mowatt's "Fashion," but, underneath all, the reminder that in spite of sentiment and fustian there was more genuine good in this old singing melodrama than in a host of the corresponding musical-comedies of to-day. Even the tunes of the period—how much simpler and truer and more musically memorable they are than the present-day jazz-jumbles! We laugh at "Come, Birdie, Come" and "Walking Down Broadway." Where shall we find better tunes now? Speaking generally, and as a proud Victorian myself, I feel it right to set down my enjoyment of "Fashion," not so much because I laughed at it as because I loved it.

I must leave to another chronicler Mr. H. C. Sheriff's noble war-play, "Journey's End," partly because I missed the Stage Society's performance of it, and partly because it is now running at the Savoy and may be said to belong to the

New Year rather than the old. Of other modern effort practically everything has been representative of old-fashioned cast-iron success like "The Patsy," or of half-baked promise like "Glamour."

I should like, however, to add just one word in tribute to the courage and value of Mr. William Poel's experimental platform-stage production of John Fletcher's "Bonduca" at the King's Hall, Covent Garden. The play did not interest me very much; but the absolute necessity it revealed for the building of a theatre in London where a platform-stage of this kind will fit naturally to its architectural environment could hardly have been more forcibly brought home to us. One feels just ashamed when one thinks that at seventy-seven this great pioneer of our theatre must still be dependent upon casual support for keeping on a work which is one of the few worth-while things our stage is doing. Here, at any rate, is something that the Drama League can and should strive for.

RECITAL OF MIME BY IRENE MAWER

The Recital of Mime, given by Irene Mawer at the Arts Theatre Club on December 11, provided an entertainment in which grace and charm were the chief factors in the onlookers' enjoyment. In the little scene *chez Monsieur le Perruquier*, however, Miss Mawer more than satisfied these desires, which were forming at the back of one's mind. As the dapper hairdresser she gave us as perfect a piece of miming as one could desire to see, and though Miss Mawer is above the temptation to risk such an anti-climax, the audience made it clear that they would have liked to have seen the whole scene again.

In January, at the same theatre, Miss Mawer and a Festival Company revived "L'Enfant Prodigue," with very great success.

A SUGGESTION FOR SCHOOLS

Mlle. Gachet, Director of French Studies at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, 61 Gower Street, London, would be glad to hear from any schools or colleges interested in performances of French classical plays for the benefit of students. The repertoire might include plays by Molière, Marivaux, Régnard, etc., and a short lecture could accompany the performance. The idea has obviously much to recommend it as an aid to the study of the French language and literature.

CALDERÓN AND HIS DRAMA

PEDRO CALDERÓN DE LA BARCA was making his first attempts at drama in the year of Shakespeare's death. The two have many points of comparison, but two essential distinctions, that while Shakespeare was in a special sense a universal dramatist, in the work of Calderón is found a strong reflection of the highest in Spanish culture and life of the seventeenth century; and while Shakespeare was in a certain way negative, reacting with perfect freedom and elasticity to every philosophy, Calderón always wrote with the crucifix above him and the sword at his side. He is above everything else the mouthpiece of all that greatness of Spain which sent her sons to conquer a new world and plant the Cross there. He had never the slightest doubt about the glory or the ethics of war, and he had all the austere faith of the dons.

The facts of his life are consistent with the elements of his art. He was born in Madrid on January 17, 1600, and was educated by the Jesuits at the Imperial College. According to one account he did his military service in Flanders, and according to another he sought to revenge himself on a certain Pedro de Villegas, who had wounded his brother, and whom he forced to take sanctuary in the Holy Trinity church. There is no doubt that he was for some time a soldier, although his first plays, which were "Miracle Plays," known in Spain as "Autos Sacramentales," were produced in his twenty-first year. He lived a court life, took monastic orders in 1651, became Chaplain of Honour in the Royal Palace, and died peacefully and in the respect of his countrymen, at the age of eighty-one.

Existing portraits show him to have had a strong ascetic face, grey-bearded, and with a somewhat proud turn of the lips, but an expression in which is mixed a curious placidity. Practically nothing else is known of him; like Shakespeare he had no contemporary biographer, and in all probability his life was not an eventful one, if events are sudden changes of exterior circumstance.

Like nearly every great genius he fulfilled a practical purpose in art, as well as the more airy one of mere creation. As Chaucer moulded a language, as Shakespeare made

English drama an art, as Wordsworth tramped out a path along which poetry could return from a by-road, Calderón set the Spanish stage for a future which has justified him. Lope de Vega was still alive when Calderón's name began to be heard in Spain, but Lope de Vega's work was done. He had been a greater "playwright" than Calderón, his stage-craft had been almost incredible considering that he had written when nothing but the ecclesiastical drama existed. His characterization was more directly human than Calderón's, and his handling of the most intricate situations, some of which for sheer comedy are still unsurpassed, was more masterly.

Certainly Calderón had something to build on, but before his time there had been no attempt to portray completely the strongest emotions, and drama to him meant that. He did not care that one of his characters spoke for ten minutes in rhymed couplets while the rest of the company stood and made the best of it; that a fanatic should address a bumpkin for twenty stanzas on the fervour of his faith did not seem to him unnatural. He was occupied in revealing things for which he found poetry the only conveyance, as Shakespeare had found. Realism in the sense that we use it to-day meant nothing to Calderón, for his was a higher realism, the true portrayal by any means that offered, of a creation filled with something too potent for prose. That was the extrinsic function of his work.

The Spanish drama after Lope de Vega had been in danger of becoming mere stage-craft, or worse still, becoming what one may say that English drama has become, conscious stage-craft. And by ignoring the usual limitations of "situation" and "dialogue," by insisting on the triumph of his theme, Calderón kept it in the limits of art, and in so doing, of course, produced the finest "stage-effects" of all.

Not that he despised action in his plays. On the contrary he used it with tremendous effect. Chivalry, "honour" in the duelistic sense, revenge, were the passions of the Spanish grandee, and Calderón's characters have them all. They defend their faith, their noblest deeds are done for the honour of a lady's name; not in the self-conscious

CALDERON AND HIS DRAMA

way of Tennyson's knights but with a beautiful matter-of-course directness which was nothing of Calderón's creating, but was an everyday sign of his time and his people. His heroes are not even idealized. They are the dons who made that immense empire and fought because they believed that they must carry their faith over the world. So that "action" meant to Calderón the defence of certain beliefs—religious and practical—against any odds. And his duels and broils, which are many, all more or less carry out that idea.

"*The Devotion of the Cross*" (*Le Devoción de la Cruz*) for instance, opens with a good example of Calderón's use of action. After a brief colloquy between two buffoons, Esibio and Lisardo enter, and the latter says courteously:—

We will not go further
Because this hidden place
Away from the road
Is good for my purpose.
Get out your sword, Esibio;

Esibio asks, with equal politeness, what Lisardo's quarrel with him may be, and is told:—

They are so many
That the tongue lacks voice,
Reason lacks reasons,
And patience lacks long suffering.
I should like, Esibio, to hush them,
And even to forget them
Because when they are repeated
They re-create the offence.

However, during the next seventy lines he is explaining his reason for challenging Esibio. It is that the latter has written a number of love-letters to his sister, and as her family is not rich enough to give her a dowry she is to enter a convent, and her lover must be challenged to a duel, so that her brother may either kill him, and end his love of her, or be killed, and no longer see it. And all this is put forward in a perfectly disinterested manner, so that the duel takes place as quite the proper thing under the circumstances. Certainly Calderón did not have to look far for dramatic action. He lived in an arduous age. He had plenty of scope as a dramatist of hasty passions.

He had a predilection, curiously modern, for a bare background. His settings are little more than those used by the German impressionists. "Life's a Dream" (*La*

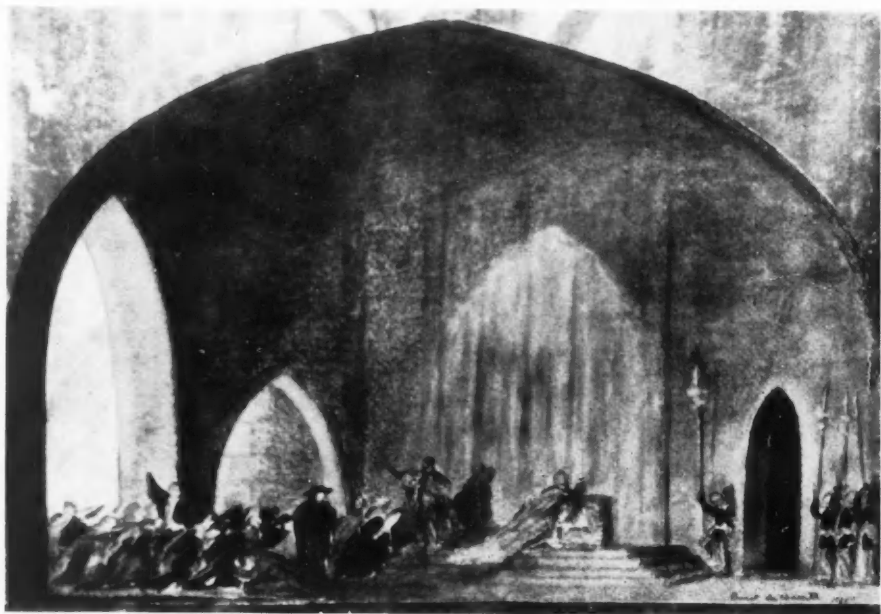
Vida es Sueño) his greatest work, opens with a scene of this sort. "On one side a cliffy mountain, on the other a tower whose keep serves as Segismundo's prison. The door, which is towards the spectator, is a-jar. The action opens at evening." Or again in "*The Devotion of the Cross*," the third day and seventh scene is simply—"The other side of the mountain, at whose peak is a cross." He never expends words on details of his scenery, but somehow the drama itself suggests the background—sombre, rugged and stony.

Thus it is that everything in Calderón's plays is made secondary to the one thing that counted with him, the portrayal of mankind, intensified by its passions. Calderón saw that the poor attempts made by men in everyday life spontaneously to put into words their love, or their hatred, their devotion to a faith or a cause, were futile, and certainly not worth setting on the lips of his creations. He saw that the more unreal from the point of view of ordinary intercourse their speech was, the nearer it might approach to reality, since ordinary speech could never convey what he was attempting to convey. Shakespeare saw this, too, and in a lesser way Dickens, and pages of fruitless criticism have been wasted in saying in effect that no man ever talked like Hamlet. Of course no man ever talked as he did, but no man ever expresses the things he did. The emotions of Calderón's characters are not such as can be bandied to and fro in epigram, they are so much beyond expression that they can be approached only by the supreme poetry that is given them to speak. Merejkowski said of Calderón—"The light of human thought and the eternal questions of life and death penetrate even the drama of Calderón, glimmering dimly as yet through the haze of Catholic dogmas as the sun's rays penetrate into Gothic churches through the many-coloured glass of the jewelled windows." It is not altogether a just criticism, but when the same writer says as a key to the philosophy of Calderón that he was, as a writer, both monk and warrior, he shows a full understanding. Calderón's message was a stern one, but he lived in a stern age.

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CENTURY THEATRE, NEW YORK.

THE WORK OF MAURICE BROWNE

By G. W. Bishop

MY article in the previous number on the "Plays of the Month" was written immediately after seeing the Stage Society's production of "Journey's End" and I was able to refer briefly to it. Since then the play has been put into the regular bill at the Savoy, succeeding curiously enough "Young Woodley," another outstanding work that owed its presentation to the Stage Society and the Three Hundred Club. All who care anything for the theatre must not miss Mr. Sherriff's extraordinary fine work, certainly the most moving play that the war has produced in England and, possibly, the most promising piece by a British dramatist since "Young Woodley."

"Journey's End" is being staged under the management of Mr. Maurice Browne, who appeared in "The Unknown Warrior" and whose collaboration with Mr. Robert Nichols, "Wings over Europe," is the outstanding success of the New York theatre this season. The production of "Journey's End" is not an isolated venture but the beginning of what might turn out to be the most important theatrical management since the famous Granville-Barker days. I have had several long talks with Mr. Maurice Browne and he has given me a fairly comprehensive idea of the scope of his scheme.

First of all, something of his work in America where, although an Englishman, he spent nearly twenty years of his life. He is known as the Father of the Little Theatre Movement. The pretentious title is not of his choosing, but there is no doubt the Little Theatre does owe almost everything to him and Miss Ellen Van Volkenburg.

The Chicago Little Theatre was opened in 1912 and it came into being as a result of Mr. Maurice Browne and Miss Van Volkenburg's desire to see plays of a kind that were not then being presented on the American stage; out of Miss Van Volkenburg's desire to learn her job as an actress; and out of Mr. Maurice Browne's desire to learn his job as an actor, producer, and dramatist.

They started with a capital of 500 dollars

and infinite faith, remodelling a 4th floor back into a small theatre. They opened with 1,000 dollars worth of debts, which were paid off by the end of the second year out of subscriptions.

Chicago was chosen because it seemed to be the liveliest, least theatrically traditional city in which to make a start. For six or seven years they were always "broke," as he expressed it to me, but when they finally got on their feet in 1917, the sales and membership subscriptions amounted to 17,000 dollars a year.

America's entry into the war however killed the theatre just when it became a success—a success due mainly to the fact that the Chicago Little Theatre was run on a subscription basis. It was probably the first time that the subscription idea had been used in America. The idea was taken over by the Washington Square Players and is, as everyone knows, the corner-stone of the Stage Guild's success. Another cause of the success was that they "plumped" uncompromisingly for the plays they personally believed in, such as "The Trojan Women", "The Medea of Euripides" and Synge's "Deirdre of the Sorrows." The proportion of such plays however, was comparatively small, since such plays are comparatively few, and most of the productions were the 19th century realists, e.g. Shaw, Ibsen, Strindberg, etc. Their failure, artistically, according to Mr. Browne, was that they did not produce sufficient unacted plays by American dramatists; that failure was remedied later by the Provincetown Players—with what success everyone knows.

After the closing of the Chicago Little Theatre, the Company toured the middle western and eastern towns and from 1918 on, they spent almost annually half the year on the Pacific coast and half the year in New York, proving all the time that there was a paying public for first-rate plays, provided they were done in a first-rate way.

The Chicago Little Theatre started as an amateur movement, but it rapidly became professionalised through continu-

THE WORK OF MAURICE BROWNE

ous play. Profit-sharing was practised from the beginning. Mr. Browne says that the acting was atrocious to start with, but the staging from the outset was admirable; much better than anything previously seen in America. He gradually became convinced by experience, he told me, that next to the play the actor was the thing and about 1920-21 he gave his attention to an attempt to rediscover the fundamentals of acting, not to the neglect of stage-craft but to its very definite subordination to the player. He made a long tour of the European theatre and studied acting, coming to the conclusion that two things were important:

- (1) The inner workings of the player;
- (2) The method of conveying those inner workings to the audience. He realised that sincerity was essential but insufficient in itself without the power of projection; that there was no such thing as stereotyped technique, but that each artist makes his own technique.

He returned to America to train young theatre folk in the art or science of rediscovering for themselves what (1) Impels them to act or to design scenery or costumes, or to write; (2) How to convey what they want to express to the public.

Experimental schools of the theatre were started in Chicago, Seattle, San Francisco, Santa Barbara and Los Angeles; of which the Seattle experiment was by far the most significant.

He has now become convinced that any sound scheme for re-habilitation of the theatre involves: (1) A show window in the metropolis; (2) An experimental plant, or factory, not in the metropolis.

And his intention in London is to stage the best plays that can be found. His own personal preference is for colour, movement, and music in drama, believing that for such plays there is a tremendously large public, but, plays, first-rate of their kind, such as "Journey's End," will have a definite place in his theatre.

An important part of the project is the experimental side, which in London will take the form of performances of plays on Sundays and matinees for more specialised audiences, and an attempt will

be made at an organisation of that audience on a large scale, making the theatre a focussing point for similar activities in London and elsewhere.

In addition to the London theatre there is actually in course of preparation in the country a playhouse that is being converted from a 15th century barn. It will seat about 250 and be used as an experimental school of drama.

Miss Van Volkenburg is now in America studying conditions there, and will bring a full and extensive report to England in the spring. Until she arrives it will not be possible to give any details of the running of the school or to formulate its relationship to the London theatre.

IBSEN CENTENARY

"THE LADY FROM THE SEA," BY BRISTOL AMATEURS

Amateur theatrical companies who embark on the production of an Ibsen play usually show more daring than discretion, but the Bristol Folk House Players deserve congratulation on their performances of "The Lady from the Sea," which were undertaken to mark the Ibsen centenary. They were under the direction of Mrs. F. W. Rogers, who in a brief introductory speech mentioned that in the early days of the Folk House Players they studied an Ibsen play, but for some reason or other did not produce it. Now as an educational body they had not only studied, but had produced an Ibsen play in connection with the centenary.

JORDANS, BUCKS.

The Jordans Players provide entertainment to the villagers and the many visitors who come to this beautiful village, in the form of plays, pageants and so forth.

They gave, in the spring, the many scenes from "The School for Scandal," in modern dress, produced by Mrs. Voysey.

The summer pageant, composed by Mr. Montague Fordham, was given in the beautiful Hostel garden, an ideal setting. The subject was a perfectly simple one—a midsummer day's festival at the village in Tudor days. There were spoken parts as well as panoramic effects. Part of its special interest was its historical accuracy. The village festival, directed by the Reeve, and kept in order by the Village Constable, drew in typical strangers of the time: a Pardoner, a professional licensed beggar, etc. There were strolling players and the Lord of the Manor brought in Henry VIII, resting after the worries and scenes that had preceded the execution of Anne Boleyn. The give and take of the talk was really good comedy, and the moving crowd and by-play was skilfully and naturally arranged.

DRAMA IN HAWAII

By Shirland Quin

ALL nations and people have their drama. It may exist in forms that are enacted in buildings of bricks and mortar, or it may be a savage dance stamped out in a cocoanut grove to the accompaniment of the beating of shark-skin drums and gourds, or the twanging of primitive stringed instruments. One audience would probably be as puzzled as the other were they to exchange places, yet as most of us know, out of the dance sprang the drama and even our modern comedy has its origin in rhythmic movement.

Therefore it has been extraordinarily interesting to have been able to witness a play about their own Island history given by Hawaiians who hitherto have mainly expressed their dramatic abilities by their native Hula dance.

The play which they enacted sprang, like many another, from necessity, but on this occasion it was the social necessity of observing the Sesquicentennial Celebrations of Captain Cook's discovery of the Islands. A Commission, appointed to ensure that the United States Secretary of War, the officers of three British warships and other distinguished persons designated by their nations to attend the celebrations were duly entertained, decided that a historical play must be given and preferably one dealing with the landing of Captain Cook. There was no such thing in existence, which is understandable enough, for when Captain Cook discovered the Islands in 1778—only 150 years ago—the Hawaiians had no written language and did not know that other lands even existed, (at times one envies this idyllic state!) The Commission was therefore faced with a problem. The coral-strand travesties which have from time to time appeared in the cities of America and England merely cause laughter among the people of those lands they depict. What was to be done?

By a stroke of commonsense and insight the Commission laid the burden upon a well-known Honolulu artist, Mr. James

Wilder and most amazingly a very beautiful and moving play was forthcoming.

Another artist, Mr. Earl Schenck, designed an old time Kanaka village, (see plate, p. 77), and so set amid a cocoanut grove near the famous Waikiki beach, with palms for the main part of the scenery and stage lighting provided by the moon (aided by her modern assistant—the army searchlight) "*Hawaii 150 Years Ago*" was presented and a real Hawaiian play was brought into being.

There was no inevitable castaway being enticed into complications beneath palm trees by a dark-eyed maiden in a fringed skirt; instead we saw a native village unwrap itself from sleep as the dawn rose. We saw lithe brown-skinned Kanakas going about their morning work, just as everyone does, only instead of hurrying to the office they were pounding their poi, making shark spears, weaving tapa mats and leis of flowers, catching and cooking a sucking pig, climbing an eighty-foot cocoanut tree to pull down the nuts, and playing, scolding, fighting, gambling, flirting, and getting food as we all do. Then the aged Queen enters the village, followed by her retinue and her soothsayer, who, when asked for the daily prediction, answers:—

SOOTHSAYER:

Born of the Heavens . . . O Ka Lani I have witnessed a great pink cloud moving slowly to the South. The Koae, the white plumaged fisher bird hovers above an azure sea . . . and by my infallible gourd of charms I predict a fair quiet day.

Then almost at once, to confound the poor man, comes a strange and overwhelming sound. A sound hitherto quite unknown . . . cannon-fire. Captain James Cook has arrived! A fisherman races from the shore and prostrates himself before the aged Queen, crying:—

FISHERMAN:

Off shore . . . two islands! Two islands float hither on glittering wings. Smoke pours from their sides and the roar of thunder. Two war canoes full of scarlet-skinned men are heading through the surf.

DRAMA IN HAWAII

Another fisherman races up:—

SECOND FISHERMAN:

Noi! Malii! Danger comes upon us! Hard by the sand come strange boats full of strange-looking men. Their hair and skin is red and their eyes are blue and glitter with ferocity. They speak an outlandish tongue. . . They speak with harsh voices. Terrible voices. Fear-some blasts rip open the air.

(This description of the English tongue may scarcely be called comforting, but nevertheless is understandable when compared to the Hawaiian voices!)

So, as Captain Cook lands there is great tension. Is he friend or foe? After certain language difficulties are skilfully overcome by the dramatist it is discovered that Cook has come in friendship. All's well. The aged Queen and the Captain shake hands and feasting begins. The Queen commands a performance of the Royal Hula by her dancers and Captain Cook orders a hornpipe or two by the sailors of the flagship "Resolution." Then, after the feasting, there is a procession of barbaric beauty as the natives slowly disappear from sight on their way shorewards to view the strange vessel.

For sheer loveliness, dignity and drama this simple play of Mr. James Wilder deserves the highest praise. So do the native artists, to many of whom acting is an entirely new art.

I understand a coloured film is to be made and although this will probably be but the shade of the actual play, I would suggest you see it, for I venture to think that "*Hawaii 150 Years Ago*" will give you more pleasure than all the men and maidens who have been coral-stranded in the West End Theatres.

THE POETRY SOCIETY

A dramatic reading in costume of "*As Hand with Hand*," by B. L. Bonhay, was given on November 27, by kind permission of Lady Sybil Smith, at Mitford House, Lennox Gardens. The play was dated 625 A.D., taking place during the picturesque and romantic Anglo-Saxon period. The parts were read by verse-speaking medallists of the Poetry Society. In several cases the costumes were very effective; in fact, it seemed almost a pity, so much trouble having been taken, that it was not performed as a play.

L. H.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

SIR,—Mr. Basil Dean's revised description of the financial organization of the Festival Theatre is nearer the truth. He doubts whether I would seriously maintain that, *after due allowance for interest on capital invested, depreciation and so forth*, the Festival Theatre is a commercial enterprise in the common acceptance of that phrase. In the common acceptance of that phrase it is not, because *after due allowance for interest on capital, depreciation and so forth*, profits are not allowed to be distributed to shareholders but remain in the enterprise. Therein lies its strength. While it may be a matter for discussion whether subsidised theatres are desirable, the Festival Theatre does not enjoy a subsidy and therefore should not be exposed to admiration or criticism on an incorrect assumption.

But Mr. Basil Dean's charge concerning my reluctance to produce original work demands reply.

(1) The widely published aim of the Festival Theatre was to the effect that it was founded to perform "*The Greatest Plays of All Ages and All Countries*." Now, I read perhaps a hundred plays every year, but I am obliged to subscribe to the widely-expressed opinion, in which other Art Theatre directors concur, that good, let alone great plays, suitable for modern art-theatre requirements, are hardly being written in English at present. Some part of the cause of this I can tell Mr. Basil Dean, but that would require more space than I dare ask for in this letter. Therefore, he is blaming me for not doing something which my theatre never undertook to do, i.e., perform indifferent modern plays that are bad theatre-art and invite financial catastrophe.

(2) I have in my possession nineteen licences from the Lord Chamberlain's department issued to this theatre, which means that this number of plays have received their first public performance here. I think Mr. Dean's contention is insufficiently justified.

(3) On the other hand, the number of new plays which we have included in our programmes has formed the subject of savage criticism, not only in Cambridge, but in such a journal as the *SATURDAY REVIEW*.

Three years of consideration and practical experience in this matter have convinced me that the fostering of talents of authorship by producing inferior plays is a suicidal policy which must kill the art theatre in its present stage of insecurity. Talents of authorship will be fostered when we are sufficiently secure to run a baby theatre and a school of stage-craft in connection with each firmly-established art theatre. This is only likely to be achieved by co-operation, but English art theatres insist on existing like anchorites in the Egyptian desert. Travellers occasionally hear lurid reports to one concerning another's feats of asceticism, which has the effect of spurring the recipient to still greater frenzy of self-immolation, but the effort seems purely negative and progress in creative activity seems virtually non-existent, save in the purely amateur enterprises.

Yours faithfully,

January 8, 1929.

TERENCE GRAY

BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE NOTES



THE JOURNAL OF THE BRITISH DRAMA LEAGUE

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Telephone: GERRARD 8011.

Neither the Editor nor the Drama League as a whole accepts any responsibility for the opinions expressed in signed articles printed in this Journal.

ON Jan. 15, Sir Nigel Playfair officially opened the new Club Room which has been instituted at 8 Adelphi Terrace for the benefit of members of the Drama League. Nearly two hundred visitors attended, a large proportion of whom have joined the club at the modest annual subscription of ten shillings. The Club is only available to members of the League, but Country members may join for the reduced subscription of five shillings. We believe that the advantages of membership will be widely appreciated, and those who cannot use the Club by day will welcome the evening Debates, the first of which, on the Stage Censor, will take place on the evening of Feb. 15. The Council is much indebted to Mrs. Geoffrey Whitworth for her supervision of the decoration of the Club Room, which is generally agreed to be both distinctive and charming.

Members of the League now have in their hands particulars of the Memorial by which it is proposed to commemorate the life and art of Ellen Terry. At Small Hythe in Kent, the house in which she died is to be acquired and kept in perpetuity in honour of her memory. A Barn adjoining the cottage, is also to be adapted as a Theatre where it is hoped to institute an Annual Dramatic Festival during the week in July, in which the anniversary of Ellen Terry's death falls. No words of ours are needed to commend this project, and donations should at once be sent to the Hon. Treasurer, Ellen Terry Memorial Fund, 56 Manchester Street, London, W.

To supplement the work of our London Easter School for Amateurs (April 3rd to 13th) we are planning a School on quite different lines to be held during the first fortnight of August, with Miss Edith Craig as director of rehearsals. The site is not yet fixed but it will be in the country, probably near the Sussex coast. We shall try to arrange for camping, and special attention will be given to plays for children. We may even go so far as to arrange a Juvenile Branch for play-work at drama with the aim of giving the young idea materials and leisure to employ them while their parents are more strenuously engaged.

We wish once again to draw the attention of members to the Amateur Dramatic Year Book, published by Messrs. A. and C. Black. This book is not only an extremely handy work of reference, but contains, as readers of Mr. John Drinkwater's review in a recent number of DRAMA will recollect, a large amount of valuable literary and critical matter. To be of permanent utility this should, and is intended to be, an annual publication. But that must necessarily depend to a large extent on the support of League members. All who have not yet done so should send 5s. to the Bookshop. The book will be sent by return.

RECENT BOOKS

Reviewed by Norman Marshall

- "John Bull Calling." By John Drinkwater. Sidgwick and Jackson. 1s.
 "The Litigants." By Jean Racine. Translated by W. R. Dunstan. Oxford. 2s. 6d.
 "Hoppla!" By Ernst Toller. Translated by Herman Ould. Benn. 6s.
 "Vera Trefilova." By Arnold Haskell. British-Continental Press. 2s.
 "Several of My Lives." By Louis N. Parker. Chapman and Hall. 21s.

ONE of the weaknesses of both contemporary play-writing and contemporary acting is their lack of gusto. The actor puts the blame on the playwright for working so much in half-tones, the playwright replies that he writes for the type of acting which the theatre offers him. But the actor certainly will not be able to blame Mr. Drinkwater—at least, not Mr. Drinkwater in the mood in which he wrote his "political parable in one act." The author may have taken his parable quite seriously before he began his play, but in the finished play there is not enough of the parable to bother anybody. It is chiefly an immensely successful farce, written with extreme technical dexterity, a magnificently assured sense of the theatre, and—above all—with tremendous relish and gusto. I have an uneasy feeling that when this play becomes popular with amateur companies it will often be reined in and made to proceed at a gentle jog-trot by players who have not the vigour and speed to keep up with the play.

Mr. Dunstan, too, writes with plenty of gusto. His translation of Racine's "The Litigants," described as "an experiment in rhymed anapaests," is a thoroughly lively and racy piece of work. There is, however, a danger that in performance the metre may prove too strongly marked and inflexible for a play of this length. It will certainly need plenty of vivacity and lightness of touch on the part of the actors if the steady beat of the rhythm is not to become a rather monotonous pounding towards the end of the performance. Otherwise the translation is astonishingly successful, full of humour and gaiety, beautifully neat and rapid. Produced with the right touch it should be highly entertaining on the stage. I recommend it to the consideration of intelligent amateur companies.

"Hoppla!" is described on the wrapper as a magnificent opportunity for a producer. Like all expressionist plays it is packed with opportunities for every sort of trick producing, but the tricks of unadulterated expressionist producing, for all their cleverness, bear much the same relation to the real art of producing as does step-dancing to ballet-dancing. Expressionism has, of course, added enormously to the resources of playwrights, producers and designers, but it is too crude a form of technique to be used by itself, and, as Eugene

O'Neil pointed out in his criticism of "From Morn To Midnight," one of its great dangers for both playwrights and producers is that it is too easy. "Hoppla" is yet another instance of the sterility of the purely expressionist play. Once more we have the platitudinous theme and the same drearily uninteresting types of the expressionist play, surrounded by a great deal of pretentious hullabaloo and technical stunting. This time the chief stunt is the use of films. Obviously there are unexplored possibilities in combining action on stage and screen, but in this play there has been no real attempt to weld the two together. In fact, the author obligingly explains that the film interludes can quite easily be omitted if desired. In other words, they are quite unnecessary, merely an extra stunt for the producer if he thinks it worth the trouble and expense. The expressionist claim that their technique was evolved because the time had come for the drama to express subtleties beyond the scope of the existing dramatic forms, but in practice expressionism in its extreme form has been used solely to state the most obvious platitudes in a mechanical and coldly impersonal way.

Mr. Haskell's essay on "Trefilova" is the first of an excellently produced and illustrated series of monographs entitled "The Artists of the Dance." There is so little properly informed criticism of the ballet written in this country that one eagerly welcomes a series like this, especially as up to now practically every book written on the subject has been published at a price which has put it out of reach of the ordinary reader. But it is disappointing that all three of the authors who are to write the studies—Mr. Haskell, M. Svetloff and M. Levinson—are staunch and unyielding classicists. Obviously, modernism is going to get little sympathy in the series, and Mr. Haskell's essay is marred by his obstinate refusal to make any attempt to understand the modern ballet. His main objections to it are that it has no technique, no line, and does not give the ballerina sufficient opportunity to display her art. In reality the modern ballet is solidly based on classical technique and is an inevitable development of it: what is lost in line it gains in form: above all, it is essentially creative instead of contenting itself with classroom steps for its material. But it is a pity that in a series such as this there should not be an equal appreciation of the perfection of the classical form and the natural development of the ballet towards new forms.

The really important part of Mr. Louis Parker's book is the last twenty-five pages. Not that the rest of the book is uninteresting. On the contrary, it is a singularly charming and readable collection of reminiscences. But the last twenty-five pages consist of a chapter entitled "My Pageant Life," in which Mr. Parker explains with the maximum of clearness and conciseness what a pageant is and how a pageant should be produced.

THE THEATRE DESIGNS OF HANS WILDERMANN

By James Laver

THE movement towards simplified staging, which originated in the work of Adolph Appia and Gordon Craig, and which has had such far-reaching influence on the Continent has, so far, hardly made itself felt at all on the London stage. Indeed it is only at exhibitions of the Art of the Theatre, such as was held at the Victoria and Albert Museum some six years ago, that the average Englishman has any chance of becoming acquainted with the progress that has been made.

The essence of Craig's doctrine was, that it is as possible to suggest a temple by two square pillars as by any elaborately painted backcloths, that, in fact, the temple so suggested is infinitely more likely to be convincing to the intelligence than the painful *trompe l'œil*. Craig's system of folding screens, of different height and width, the colour and texture of which was to be controlled by lighting, would obviously have the effect of eliminating curves almost entirely from the main structure of the stage setting. The resulting squareness and simplicity was in harmony with the tendencies of modern interior decoration and of modern architecture, especially in Germany where, even before 1914, the Munich School had already inaugurated its own brand of decorative puritanism.

In stage decoration the tendency towards simplicity was felt more strongly in Germany than elsewhere, although, of course, the efforts of Copeau in France and of the Marais Theatre in Belgium, pointed in the same direction. Many other tendencies have influenced the theatre since—Expressionist, Constructivist, and the rest—but a certain number of designers have remained faithful to the first ideal. One of the ablest of these is Hans Wildermann, of Breslau, one of whose drawings for the stage is here reproduced.

Wildermann exhibited two designs for "Parsifal" in the Amsterdam Exhibition,

which did so much to stimulate interest in the Art of the Theatre all over Europe. A number of examples of his more recent work has been acquired for the National collection at South Kensington, where they can be consulted by the student.

Among these, one of the most typical and most effective is the design for Shakespeare's "Julius Cæsar." There is no minute reproduction of Imperial Rome à la Alma Tadema, but he has succeeded in expressing, with the greatest economy of means, its somewhat bleak grandeur. The huge buildings indicated are the nearest suggestions, but how much they suggest!

His designs for "Samson and Delilah" are even simpler. In one scene square columns, grouped round flights of steps, lead the eye inward to a brilliantly lighted sky; in another, the columns have become a forest, by the addition of a jagged cut-cloth towards the front of the stage, and a symbolic landscape at the back. In a further scene—Samson in prison—the proscenium arch has been contracted, so that there is only space for the blind captive to turn round his mill. For the final scene, the open sky of the first has been replaced by a back wall, with two huge pillars, between which sits the dimly-seen figure of an idol.

Such simplifications are particularly to be desired in opera, the necessary conventions of which make a Wardour Street naturalism more than ever out of place. Besides, one of the problems of producing an opera in a country like ours, where there is no assistance from the State, is that of finance, a problem which the simplified setting would make some contribution towards solving.

For "Don Carlos," Herr Wildermann abandoned the squareness of his designs for "Samson." Everything was founded on the pointed arch, and the national

THE THEATRE DESIGNS OF HANS WILDERMANN

atmosphere was suggested by a skilful use of tree-forms, and a crude yellow light to suggest the glare of the sun. The door of the church in Act IV showed one pointed arch within another, like a nest of boxes. There was no elaboration, no painted sculpture, but an astonishing degree of imaginative truth.

Perhaps Herr Wildermann's most striking design, among those acquired by the authorities at South Kensington, is that for Ibsen's "Peer Gynt," here reproduced. It would be hard to say what the scene represents exactly, for it consists simply of two black walls, like the ends of a tunnel, and

beyond there is a yellow sky, with a huge rose-capped mountain—a most effective symbol of the deliverance of the human spirit from bondage.

His design of Handel's "Belshazzar" is more purely formal—almost constructivist, with its three-level stage joined by slopes and steps. Many will prefer something less austere, less intellectualized, and to them may be recommended those designs by Herr Wildermann mentioned above, which show him preserving that balance between generalized representation and delight in pure form which makes his success as a scenic designer.

THE PLAY IN THE SCHOOL V—A BOY'S POINT OF VIEW

THE boy's point of view is quite plain: 'If I want to act, why in heaven's name shouldn't I be allowed to?' And the answer to that is quite plain too: 'Your whole education is founded on the theory that you should not do what you like. Life in this world, you will find, is unpleasant—so unpleasant that when you are old you will look back on your years at school as the happiest years of your life. Since this is so, it is best that your school work should be as unpleasant as we can make it, so that you shall become accustomed to misery—so accustomed to it that you will enjoy it, and be led into the delusion that life is a happy affair. Your inclinations may be completely literary, but you will be taught mathematics and science, though the simplest tables which you learn before you are nine are really all you need to know. If you are a scientific genius in embryo, and want to spend all your time studying science, you will not be allowed to; you must also learn history and languages, though they are not likely to be of the slightest use to you at any time of your life. And then you ask why you shouldn't be allowed to act. The answer is—because you *want to!*'

That is the principle of education, as anyone who can recall his school-days honestly will admit. It is the method, not

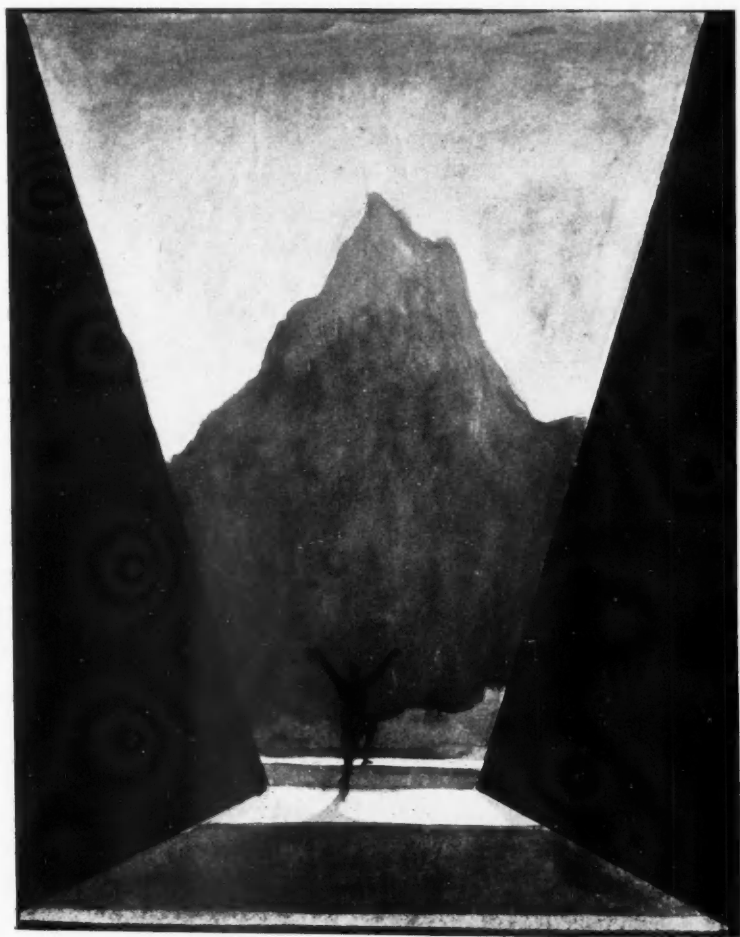
the principle, which has changed and is changing.

After some centuries of experience it has been found that the best way of getting a donkey to move is to hold a carrot in front of its nose. It was a long, long time before this was realised, and during all that time it was thought that the only way of getting a donkey to stir at all was to beat it until it had to get out of the way of the stick.

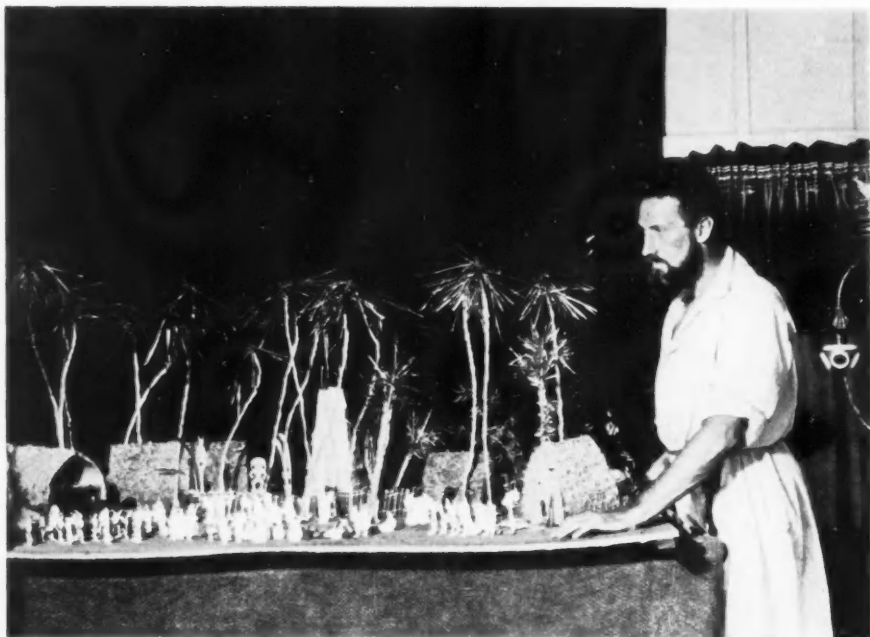
Countless millions of children have been forced to their uncongenial tasks with the threats of punishment—punishment which until recently was almost exclusively corporal.

But gradually the supporters of the rod are yielding to the champions of the carrot. Schools are becoming less and less like prisons. Some have libraries which the *boys can use*. Some have debating societies and chess clubs. Some have Shakespeare societies for the purpose of reading Shakespeare's plays without analysing the speeches on the way. Some of them even go so far as to allow boys to act in plays.

For it has been found that it is advisable to make life in schools at least as pleasant as life outside them, and to adopt a system of rewards instead of one of punishments. By offering boys the reward of being allowed to do things they like, they can be



STAGE SETTING BY HANS
WILDERMANN FOR IBSEN'S
"PEER GYNT." FROM THE
ORIGINAL DRAWING IN THE
VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM.



MR. EARL SCHENCK, A HONOLULU
ARTIST, AT WORK ON THE SET
WHICH HE DESIGNED FOR THE
PAGEANT PLAY AT HAWAII.

THE PLAY IN THE SCHOOL

persuaded to do the things which they do not like.

Amateur Theatricals are very popular, even with children, and they can be made to function as a splendid carrot. The Play in the School is an excellent relief from the monotony, tyranny and boredom of the ordinary routine as one could find, for it provides work—enjoyable work—for actors, carpenters, decorators and electricians. What other carrot has so many flavours? Nearly everybody likes acting, and quite a number can act. Nearly everybody likes using his hands and making things. Some have a taste and even a capacity for design, and every play requires scenery—and most of these produced in schools are costume plays. There is no reason why boys should not make their own costumes, a boy's liking for dressmaking is a clue to his character which a headmaster will (or should) find invaluable. And the construction of a small system of stage lighting is a suitable pastime for scientifically-minded boys.

The boys concerned in the production of a play will most probably neglect their ordinary work, which is a blessing in disguise. They will realise that there is some work which one can enjoy doing: work of definite achievement. Some of them will become conceited, and conceit is a very fine virtue, for it requires continual effort and work to justify it. Some masters will frown on the proceedings, and they will consequently be despised by the boys for their stupidity—this will breed in the boys a healthy contempt for those of their elders who are not also their betters. The production will occasion a tremendous amount of earnest competition, for everybody wants to do better than the others; and will reveal much talent which is not called for in a class.

Also the production of a play in a school creates a friendship between the boys and the master or masters concerned in it. It is this which is more likely than any other advantage to cause Amateur Theatricals to be adopted as part of school routine.

There is almost invariably some sort of friendship between a boy who likes a certain subject and the master who teaches it. But this friendship only helps

to make the boy do the work in that particular class well; and since he likes the work he will do it satisfactorily however much he dislikes the master. If that master also teaches another subject, the benefit of the friendship is obvious, for the boy will do that work quite well also.

Any friendship between a boy and a master—whether it be created by work in the library, in the debating society, or in a play will vastly improve the work done in class. For it is difficult to face a master with the usual footling excuses for bad work if one is on friendly terms with him. And it is quite a strain on one's conscience to crib in his class.

The advantages which result from a friendship between masters and boys are indeed so obvious that every schoolmaster should be constantly attempting to create it; and he can find no more helpful medium than the production of a play.

I look forward to the day when headmasters will not only require one of their assistants to be equipped for the instruction and organisation of games, and one to be ordained, for the purpose of inflicting adequate chapel service on the boys; but will also require one to know sufficient about the drama and its production to be able to conduct Amateur Theatricals.

Then new boys at a school will not only be tested by the games master for their prowess in sports, by the choir master for the quality of their voices, and by the gym. instructor for their physical fitness, but also by the theatrical master for their talent in any capacity involved in amateur play producing.

To the diehard upholders of the rod this theatrical master will appear as a very strange creature. His duty will be to plaster his pupils' faces with grease-paint, dress them up in fantastic and uncomfortable clothes, impose on them the worry and inevitable nervousness of acting, the labour of carpentering and scene-painting and sewing, in order that their minds may be satiated with pleasure, and such horrors as geometrical progressions, chemical experiments, translations, and grammatical analyses will seem just mildly irritating and not soul-killing and mentally degrading.

But he will be a very popular master.

LESLIE STOKES

CONFERENCE OF EDUCATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Dr. F. S. Boas presided at a meeting of the Drama League on Jan. 1 at Bedford College and opened a discussion on "Shakespeare and the School."

He suggested a combination of three factors in a full study of Shakespeare in the schools. There should first be the use of Shakespeare as a class book; next the performance of scenes from his plays under the control of school authorities; and then visits of children to performances of professional actors—a factor which needed the co-operation of not only the school authorities and the dramatic profession but the administrative authorities. Shakespeare was a necessary element in the educational curriculum. The choice of plays was a matter of great interest and complexity, but he could not lay down any laws on the subject. For instance, "*Macbeth*" was written in Shakespeare's difficult period, and many might not think it suitable for the schools. There was in it a tense interest and a story, and he believed it could be read with advantage at a comparatively early stage. The subject of *Hamlet* had baffled psychologists through the ages, but the language was simpler than that of *Macbeth*. Whatever plays are chosen, the teachers must think out their methods carefully, and they must know the play through and through if they were going to make individual scenes effective. It was important that the teachers should strive to cultivate the team spirit among the players and bring the whole resources of the school into operation. That was a splendid way of promoting co-ordination. Every school should have a suitable stage on which a play could be given. He believed that the best amateurs could learn from the professionals, and it was through the professionals that the true excellence of the language of Shakespeare was brought out. It had been a real forward movement to take school children to the Old Vic and elsewhere, but it threw responsibility on the performers, for it was for them to see that the beauty of the language was fully shown and that comedy was not buried under a load of knockabout business.

Mr. Ben Greet said that the great point was that the children should act the play, for the smallest of them had the dramatic instinct. They should first of all be made to understand exactly what the play was about. It was most important for the child to characterize. He should take a single character and dive into its inmost soul. It was very necessary that the children should be taught to speak correctly. He had heard children in a play speak beautifully, and soon afterwards, when they got into the street, their language was

utterly different. Why should not the children be taught to speak real English and drop the Cockney accent? They should be trained on Shakespeare. In many of the well-known schools real stages were fitted up, and the students took a great pride in everything relating to them. It was the English of Shakespeare that should be taught, for he never used the Cockney language. He did not know of any play where Shakespeare introduced such language, even in connection with Jack Cade and his friends, who must have been Cockneys. He hoped that the Drama League would give a little more encouragement to professional performances so that pure diction and pronunciation would be instilled into the students.

"The great difficulty," said Miss Fogerty, "which faces modern education is the reconciliation of its two objects, instruction and preparation for life. Perhaps the study of Shakespeare most completely combines these two aims. I would take one point only, the attitude to women which is unconsciously expressed in the plays. Shakespeare's predecessors created no women characters, and they were overwhelmed by the difficulty of the boy actor; but Shakespeare with his exquisite quality of taste, a thing apart from genius, saw that it was possible to avoid the difficulty. His women are human beings rather than 'females.' They have courage, initiative, commonsense, administrative power, and physical strength. The influence of a Queen Regent may be seen here. Yet one question whether such women ever really lived until the present day and whether Shakespeare did not help to create them. Shakespeare never used boy players as his contemporaries did to vulgarise sex. It is, of course, in acting that such things become plain to the student of Shakespeare. There are two ways of running a school play. It must be either left completely to the actors and the result received with little comment, good or bad; or it must be completely prepared as the result of combined work among all correlated activities in the school. Half-coached performances are useless."

In the discussion, Miss Fogerty pointed out the distinction between phonetic and physiological standard; the former dealing with the selection of sounds, the latter with their actual formation. As an illustration she gave the "*Bahl id Raadh*" the common pronunciation of Mile End Road by the children in that locality. It would be as sensible to call a cold in the head a dialect, as this travesty of intelligent utterance. It was very important in the discussion to distinguish between the content of speech, its vocabulary, and the utterance which resulted from physical movement.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

CAMBRIDGE.

The Festival Theatre, under the direction of Mr. Terence Gray, opened its eighth season on January 14th with a production by Mr. Peter Godfrey of Bernard Shaw's "Saint Joan." Other plays to be produced during the Lent term are "The Pleasure Garden," by Beatrice Mayor, to be produced by Mr. Harold Ridge; "Æschylus' Prometheus," translated by R. C. Trevelyan, with music by Philip Cathie and choreography by Ninette de Valois. Mr. Frank Birch will produce "The Witch," translated from the Norwegian of Wiers-Jensen, by John Masefield. "Romeo and Juliet" will follow, and a production by Mr. Peter Godfrey of Ernst Toller's "Hoppla," translated by Herman Ould, and the season will end with "The Carpenter of Rouen, a Victorian melodrama in the genre of Sweeney Todd, to be produced by Mr. Roland Crossley.

THE NEWTON ABBOT REPERTORY COMPANY

During the Autumn Session, which began in Sept. 1928, fortnightly dramatic readings have been held for its members in the company's "Little Theatre," and eight plays have been publicly produced. The season opened with an inspiring and highly-entertaining address by the Company's newly-adopted vice-president, Mr. Cyril Maude. On the same evening there was produced, for the first time on any stage, the powerful little one-act tragedy, "Market Money," at the suggestion of the author, Mr. Eden Phillpotts, another vice-president of the Company, who was unable to be present himself but was represented by his daughter, Miss Adela Phillpotts, who expressed great delight at the way in which the play was produced and acted. In contrast to the tragedy two lighter plays were performed—"Umbrellas," by Elizabeth Baker, and "Granny's Juliet," by Herbert Swears.

In October four performances were given of Clemence Dane's "Bill of Divorcement," which was repeated the following week at Ashburton, since when an amateur dramatic society has been formed in that town, under the auspices and on the lines of the Repertory Company.

In December two performances were held of St. John Ervine's four-act comedy, "Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary," which is to be taken to Dartmouth in January, when, with the co-operation of Mr. Cyril Maude, who is to deliver a propagandist address, the Company is endeavouring, as at Ashburton, to found a local dramatic society.

An interesting event of the season has been the production of a three-act play entitled "A Winter Night's Dream," written by the youngest member of the Company (aged 12), who in it sets forth her views on society in the reign of Queen Victoria.

THREE AMATEUR SHOWS

Amateurs can be divided roughly into three groups—those who are still in the elementary stage

of simple farce, those who can competently tackle more difficult but still straightforward comedy, and those who are experienced enough and ambitious enough to play with distinction pieces that would authoritatively test the qualities of even the best professional companies.

I have recently, in one week, seen successively in London fairly typical examples of each of these groups, in the order I have named. The result, to one for the past six years accustomed to deal with amateurs in the provinces, has been interesting, and if at this stage I may venture an opinion it would be that, while the first two groups have about the same standards in both London and provinces, the Londoners in the third are far better, with the possible exception of the bigger provincial societies, e.g., at Leeds, Manchester, etc., of whose work I know only by repute.

It was a real pleasure to watch the work of the Finsbury and City Dramatic Club in "The Cradle Song" (Sierra) and in "A Night at an Inn," at the cosy little Cripplegate Institute Theatre. There was a finish about both performances which revealed intelligent and imaginative devotion to the task and reached moments of considerable artistry, individual and collective. Amid such general beauty of articulation, however, it was little short of ghastly in "The Cradle Song" to hear occasional aitches dropped, like particularly heavy bricks. There was also too much prompting necessary. But this apart, I have nothing but praise. In "The Cradle Song," where the general level was surprisingly high, I particularly liked the Doctor, a most polished piece of work by Mr. Austin G. King, Miss Elsie Vaughan's really saintly Prioress, Miss Reed's Sister Marcella, the acid but human little Vicar (Miss Sybil de Vere Matthews), and the Sister Joanna of Miss Estelle Dacheux, whilst I must not omit the charming Teresa of Miss E. Margaret Rogers.

In both plays, setting and costumes were admirable, and I imagine the producer, Mr. F. A. E. Mumford, must have felt proud of the final results of his work.

There was a pleasant all-round competence, which by the middle of the second act had settled down into mastery of their work, in the acting of the Bolingbroke Players, who staged Ian Hay's "The Happy Ending" (which is quite safe for amateurs at a certain stage) for two nights at St. Mark's Hall, Battersea Rise. On the whole, the women were stronger than the men, Thela Coley's Joan being soundly played, while little Miss Chilcott was a charming Molly. The Mildred of Dora Hamer seemed to lack definition, but Dorothy Blackman's Miss Meakin was neat. The men all improved in Act II, although I did not like the "retired proconsul" of Frederick Duggan, who, however, showed possibilities for a "stronger" part. Mr. Alan Nash, the producer, should feel he has a team which will probably continue to improve.

NEWS FROM NORTH AND SOUTH

Youthful enthusiasm and energy were the chief characteristics of the Ivydale Society's performance of "A Little Bit of Fluff" at Hatcham Liberal Club Hall, New Cross Gate. The result was jerky, with rush instead of speed, and some slight consciousness of hands and feet. The point of the dialogue was not always driven home: still, an amiably-disposed audience seemed to enjoy it. As John Ayers, Mr. A. M. A. Thurnell was a little too downright, and frequently troubled the prompter, but did not lack in pep. Mr. A. J. Thurnell showed quite a turn for "silly ass" parts. Mr. E. H. Martin Lamp was the producer.

C. D.

MARIA GREY COLLEGE PLAY READING SOCIETY

DRAMATIC CONTEST

On November 15, 1928, the four sections of the Maria Grey College (three hostels and day students) held a dramatic contest. Each section produced a scene, playing not more than fifteen minutes, with no more accessories than simple properties, and screens instead of a curtain. Winkworth Hall produced "The Land of Memory," from "The Blue Bird"; Sheffield Hall, "Sister Clare," from "The Little Plays of S. Francis; Johnston Hall, "The Visit of Lady Catherine" ("Pride and Prejudice"); and the Day Students, a scene from "The Taming of the Shrew," in modern dress. The silver cup, presented by the college and held by the winning team for a year, was awarded by Mrs. Penelope Wheeler, the judge, to the production of "Sister Clare," which showed reverent handling, restrained acting and effective lighting. The ingenious scenery of "The Land of Memory" received much praise. The contest is held annually.

NOTTINGHAM PLAYGOERS' CLUB

PLAYS BY MEMBERS

An evening of manuscript plays, written by members of Nottingham Playgoers' Club and other local authors, was given at the Club in November. The works were: "The Day's End" and "The First Violin," and "The Grass Widow," by John Odams; "Ways that are Dark," by Arthur Statham; "The Line of Death," by Ida Teather. "Ways that are Dark" and "Day's End" have both been broadcast, and the wireless version was used, the plays being read behind screens, in darkness. The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress (Alderman and Mrs. Atkey), who are old members of the Club, attended officially, her ladyship being presented with a bouquet by the secretary.

The Ibsen Centenary was commemorated during the same month.

Future bookings include "L du G," of "Punch," and "London Opinion," with two of his own comedies, and Nugent Monck, of Norwich Maddermarket Theatre.

NEVIL TRUMAN

FRIENDLY CENTURIONS

The outstanding feature of the performance of "Anne, One Hundred Per Cent," given by the Friendly Centurions on Dec. 11th, was the thoroughness of its rehearsal. It went with an ease and swing that fully deserved the warm appreciation of the audience. Vera Greenwood made a charming heroine, and all the male parts were well characterised. As usual the American accent, where it was attempted, was poorly achieved. Play-choosing must necessarily be conditioned by possibilities of casting, and this was wonderfully cast for a stock company, but it does seem a pity to choose a second-rate American play when there are far better English ones on the market.

M.M.

BIRKBECK COLLEGE

On Dec. 7 and 8 the College Literary Society gave an honest but shambling performance of "The Knight of the Burning Pestle." The foreword of the programme described the play as a blend of comedy, farce and satire. Why comedy? Surely it is a satirical farce. Those of the company who rendered it in that vein were decidedly the most at ease in their parts and the most amusing. They played the Host, the Citizen's Wife, Pompion, and—with a less "fat" chance—the Citizen. Ralph was good whenever he let himself go. Probably the presence of the Gentlemen on the stage was a real deterrent to firm acting. The poor fellows appeared to have been told to be funny in a quiet way, and given no further guidance. Might a spokesman for the audience venture to suggest that the players are not the only people in the theatre who require consideration? It is not kind—it is not even Elizabethan—to box up a crowd in a badly ventilated auditorium and allow them no breathing space for nearly three hours. The "yard" of the theatres had no roof. With roofing came the humane practice of allowing intervals to give opportunity for cleanly people to inhale fresh air.

M.M.

KING'S COLLEGE DRAMATIC SOCIETY

In December, King's College London Dramatic Society gave three performances of "The Witch," from the Norwegian of Hans Wiers-Jenssen, translated by John Masefield. The exacting parts of the Chaplain and his son were very well played by Frank Poulden and Edward Clarke, and the scene with the priests reached a high level of ensemble, but not one of the company made us believe that he or she was really afraid of witches. The difficulty of the play is not surmounted unless the people in it are so manifestly terrified that the audience find themselves shivering and begin to wonder whether, after all—? So good is the work done by this company that I feel sure they could do far better if they began by searching into the depths of the play and stretching their imaginations to its technical problems. They will find the best methods described in Mr. Granville Barker's "Hints on Rehearsing" in the Amateur Dramatic Year Book.

M.M.

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FW. ROBERTS, JOINT MANAGERS
WB. ROBERTS, DIRECTORS

